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STALINISM AND COMMUNISM IN ALBANIA

The following article was written by one of the pioneers of Communism in Albania.

Prior to 1941, there was no Communist Party in Albania. There were only three groups (the Scutari group, the Youth group, and the Koritza [Korce] group) which, while proclaiming themselves Communists, were perpetually quarreling among themselves. These three groups, through lack of experience and Marxist-Leninist education, were incapable of determining a suitable political line. Each group acted according to its own idiosyncrasies and impulses. The major part of their activity was made up of polemic attacks upon the other two opposing groups.

At the end of 1941, with Russia's entry into the war, the Scutari and the Youth groups felt the need of uniting and launched an appeal to the Koritza (the group to which the present president of Albania belonged). This group refused categorically to join the union.

Because the three groups were incapable of uniting themselves, and because they saw the USSR which, in their opinion, was the citadel of world Communism, threatened by Hitler's armies, they decided to ask intervention of foreign comrades. In the Albanian province of Kosovo, which was and is under Yugoslav domination, were comrades of the Scutari and Youth groups who were in contact with the Yugoslav Stalinists, Meladin Popovic and Dusan. The Albanian comrades in Kosovo explained the situation of the three groups to the Stalinists and, with the consent of the directors of the three groups, invited the Yugoslav Stalinists to Tirana to help form the Albanian Communist Party and end past dissension.

The two Stalinists were soon escorted secretly to Tirana and, although they did not have the official authorization of the Yugoslav Communist Party, they and their proposal were accepted.

- 1 -

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50X1-HUM

their first proposal was to call a meeting at which a certain number of each group would act as representatives. In addition to the Yugoslavs, 16 representatives of the three groups were present at the conference, the mission of which was to found the Albanian Communist Party.

The representatives presented reports and criticism of work done by their own respective groups and, at the same time, criticism of the work done by the other groups.

After each report, self-criticism, and criticism there was a general discussion which became heated and degenerated into personal attacks. The old group spirit always appeared in the course of the discussion.

When the discussions were finally terminated, the Yugoslavs, who had noted the revolutionary spirit and consciousness of the representatives of the Youth group, took unfair advantage of the sincerity and modesty of these representatives to make the following criticisms:

a. The campaign of mass agitation was not as extensive as it should have been.

b. The group has limited itself essentially to the formation of cadres and to the translation of Marxist books.

Anastase Lula and Khepi, leaders of the Youth group, supported by several elements of the other two groups (like Vasil Santoja), answered these absurd criticisms as follows:

"We do not claim to have done all that we should have done; but, on the other hand, you must understand that it was not easy to do what you suggest. You are not acquainted with the circumstances, the conditions, and the customs of our country, just as we are ignorant of the same things in your land. Communism is a doctrine which has been imported to Albania. It is not the product of the development of the economic conditions of the society of our country. The Communist movement here is carried on by intellectuals and especially by the students in secondary schools. Albania is a backward agrarian country with no industry; we have no industrial proletariat and, consequently, there is no proletarian organization, or at least, none with an economic purpose.

"Moreover, you should not commit the error of judging the present and past conditions in the same light. The new conditions make a mockery of the old. During the first days of the occupation of our country by the fascist forces, open mass agitation was difficult for two reasons: (a) the success of the Nazi-Fascist armies had caused our people to lose any hope in the eventual victory of the Allies; and (b) at the beginning of the occupation, fascism, to further its ends, temporarily improved the economic conditions of the masses. Conditions had been worse under the government of King Zog.

"In spite of all that, we did our best to reach the masses. We never limited ourselves to the formation of cadres and the translation of books, which is the accusation of the Koritsa group and an example of the group's old hate for us. We are not opposed to friendly criticisms; far from it, because the criticism of our old activity strengthens us and prepares us better for the future. We are a Youth group, full of enthusiasm but unfortunately inexperienced. The same can be said for the other two groups, who, in their reports, have exaggerated their past work.

- 2 -

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL
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50X1-HUM

"We have never had the intention of forming only cadres, which at a certain point in their formation would go out into the masses with flying flags. There is no limitation to the formation of cadres; the formation of cadres and work with the masses are two things which are closely tied together: the more cadres we have, the better we can reach the masses; and conversely, the more we penetrate into the masses, the more our cadres grow in number and strength.

"As soon as we had finished our studies, we went through the country and formed study groups everywhere. Every day the number of these groups increased. We formed these groups in the interest of our cause and not for personal glory. Now we can reach the masses on a large scale and act directly against the fascist plague and its servile functionaries.

"In conclusion, what has been done, has been done, and cannot be changed. Some have done more, others have done less. Now it is a question of being capable to do our best as good Communists."

In spite of these statements, which they made not to justify themselves but out of respect for the truth, they could not understand why the two Yugoslav Stalinists looked unfavorably upon them. Moreover, when they wished to ask more detailed explanations about the orders and the proposals, the Stalinists became angry and looked on them as intellectuals. Every time they were at loss for an explanation, the Stalinists would use the term "intellectualism" as a clinching argument.

At the end of the discussion, Meladin asked the Conference of Albanian Comrades to permit him to name the Central Committee of the Party himself. The Albanians readily agreed to this, being totally ignorant of the usual manoeuvres of the Stalinists. Meladin also asked for the names of two or three candidates from each group from whom he would choose the members of the Central Committee. However, he imposed the condition that the candidates were not to be the former directors of the groups since their past differences would tend to hinder the work of the Party, especially if new disagreements should spring up in the innermost circle of the Central Committee. The Albanian comrades also considered this argument to be valid.

A few days later, the leaders of the Youth group learned that the Central Committee had been formed by the leaders of the other groups and a military director from theirs. The Youth group was disappointed in seeing the evident bad faith and the manoeuvres of Meladin but it made no objection. Actually, the group believed, since Meladin was an experienced foreign comrade, that he should have their confidence and that he was acting in the interest of the Party. On the other hand, the members of the Youth group did not want Meladin to think that they wished to become members of the Central Committee at any cost. The leaders of the Youth group were not seeking posts in the Central Committee; their only aim was the interest of the Party.

The machinations of Meladin were perfectly natural; in his quality as a Stalinist bureaucrat he could not act otherwise. The orders which he had received from his superiors were to create only cliques of credulous agents, capable of being utilized to the fullest extent by the Kremlin. Meladin realized that the leaders of the Youth group, inasmuch they were true Marxist-Leninists, conscious of their mission, and revolutionists in the true sense of the word, constituted an obstacle to the execution of his plans.

- 3 -

CONFIDENTIAL
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50X1-HUM

Formation of a Clique

As soon as the list of the fighters of the three groups and all the material, such as propaganda books, typewriters, money, etc., had been sent to the Central Committee, one of the Yugoslavs (Dusam) and a member of the Central Committee, his assistant, began to form cells in which the fighters of the three groups were mingled. Because they were afraid of the fighters of the Youth group, they incorporated the greatest possible number of sympathizers of the other groups in the cells, with the idea of having more votes at the election of the regional committees. These sympathizers were introduced under the pretext that there were very few comrades who, at that time, had the qualifications to be fighters of the Party. At the same time, to assure themselves a majority, they introduced people who could be persuaded to play a double game. They were not afraid of people who lacked education and character; they were afraid only of the Communists. At this stage, however, their fears were unjustified.

During the conference of the delegates who were to elect the Regional Committee of Tirana (1941), a fighter of the Youth group protested against this type of election, which he called "fascist". This comrade was indignant to see that the Yugoslavs were using subterfuge in order to elect the candidates of their choice.

It is evident that these facts and others of less importance contributed to the birth of a growing discontent among the fighters of the Youth group. The dissatisfied comrades called on their former leaders, Anastas and Xhepi, and voiced their discontent. These two constantly advised the comrades not to come to them about matters which concerned only the Party and not individuals. They advised the comrades to see the responsible persons in their cells about all instances of proven mistakes. They also counseled them not to revolt, because the Party was young and mistakes were naturally inevitable.

Despite the fact that Anastas and Xhepi had done their best to calm the dissatisfied comrades by always speaking in favor of the Party, Meladin and his Central Committee accused these two men of inciting disaffection. These accusations wounded them deeply because they had had the political courage to brave the greatest dangers, not only during the fascist occupation but also under the dictatorial regime of King Zog. They had the courage openly to oppose Meladin, whom they themselves had liberated from a concentration camp and brought to Tirana, where they had placed everything in his hands.

First Conflicts

As soon as Meladin had consolidated his position in Albania and formed his own clique, he called a congress of the Albanian Communist Party for the purpose of judging Anastas and Xhepi for their being imbued with factionism. The resolution of the congress follows:

"We have proved that you two have not yet freed yourselves of factionism and, what is more serious, you have been the main instigators of this principle among the other comrades of your former group. You must admit that this is an obstacle for the Party. The congress demands that you confess your errors and that you make your self-criticism."

Despite the fact that, in addition to Meladin and his agents of the Central Committee, there was also present at the congress an individual, whom 3 months before Meladin himself had accused of being an agent of the Intelligence Service, Anastas and Xhepi did not protest and allowed the congress to follow its course. The two men made the following answer:

- 4 -

CONFIDENTIAL
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50X1-HUM

"When things do not go as they should in the Party, it is because there is some obstacle. We agree with you that this obstacle is the old group spirit. But you must not consider this group spirit unilaterally. Since we are Marxists, we must always solve our problems with the help of dialectic materialism. You know that there is no effect without cause. The group spirit which is manifested by our comrades is the result of the group spirit which exists on an even higher level among the comrades of the other two groups who are under the guidance of the Party. The disappearance of the group spirit in the comrades who are the leaders would bring about the rapid disappearance of this spirit in the other comrades. But, since you have been given the power to judge us, and for this reason you can not permit us to denounce your own faults, in the interest of the Party we can do nothing but close our eyes. We repeat that the group spirit will disappear only when you give proofs of impartiality and justice."

The congress adjourned after the following statement of Comrade Meladin.

"If the Central Committee decides to strike your names from the Party rolls and at the same time, in consideration of your qualifications as former revolutionaries, it decides to maintain contacts with you, are you ready to conform to its decision? On the other hand, we must warn you that if you adopt a hostile attitude, the Party will take more severe measures against you."

Even a child could see that the Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Party was a mere label and that the real Central Committee was formed by Meladin and Dussm themselves. Everyone understands that the members of the Central Committee were only the agents and executors of Meladin's orders.

Anastas and Xhepi, always hoping that things would improve, could not adopt a hostile attitude; on the contrary, they agreed to be always at the beck and call of the Party. Later, while still accepting the collaboration which Meladin had proposed, they began to fear that his systematic attacks boded no good. His behavior betrayed to them that he was not a true Communist. They began to consider him as a clever chauvinistic Serbian who, under the guise of Communism, wanted to form a clique to serve better the interests of his country.

Nevertheless, leaders of the Youth group thought it best to leave the responsibility of the consequences of this situation to the Central Committee. They preferred to show themselves tolerant rather than to provoke a scission in the Party. Although they were excluded from the Party, leaders of the Youth group performed honestly and willingly all the tasks which were entrusted to them. Unfortunately revolutionary honesty and conscientiousness irritated the bureaucratic clique. The honest comrades and the good revolutionists, who were admired by the fighters, had to be eliminated at all costs. To effect this, the directors ordered their agents to keep close watch on all the true Communists and particularly on the two comrades, Anastas and Xhepi. These two men, although they noticed that they were under observation, did not protest because they knew that, in the Communist Party, Party control of comrades is necessary. The thing which did gall them was the use of people who had not yet had the minimum of Marxist education and for this reason were unqualified for this task.

But worst of all, the Central Committee had ordered the agents to make unfavorable reports on the comrades whom they were to watch. The contents of many of the reports are still unknown. The comrades under observation knew that the Communist principle of Party control represented the desire of the Party to discover mistakes and to correct them. However, this Party control should never be for the purpose of trapping comrades. Unfortunately, in the Albanian Communist Party, the idea of ensnaring the comrades outweighed the spirit of correcting the committed errors. Lenin's theory of Party control from bottom to top was never even considered by the Albanian Communist Party.

- 5 -

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

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50X1-HUM

If a comrade tried to criticize in his cell the mistakes made by a leader of the Party, he was not only refused the right to make such a criticism but was even attacked by the head of the cell and called a Khepist, Trotskyite, saboteur, etc. So, in order not to be looked upon unfavorably, the comrades no longer dared to criticize the mistakes which they noticed. Here is the criticism which one of the comrades made of one of the members of the Regional Committee of Valona.

One evening this committeeman was being escorted by a band of armed partisans from one village to another when he met a group of fascist militia. Instead of showing himself worthy of the position which he held in the Party, he turned tail and fled, abandoning his comrades and even his overcoat.

There were so many similar cases that it is useless to enumerate them.

Eliminating the Opposition

In the face of continual criticism and loss of ground, the bureaucratic clique decided to extricate itself from its unfavorable position. The only way to keep its ground was to stifle as quickly as possible the revolutionary opposition, which was still in its infancy. The clique decided to eliminate by secret assassinations all the inflexible revolutionaries. Once this decision was taken, the execution was not long delayed. Lula Anastas, the best-known Marxist-Leninist in Albania, was brutally assassinated.

As soon as Comrade Difi heard of this assassination, he went to Comrade Xhepi in order to discuss this event with him and to decide what was to be done. Difi was the political commissar of the battalion of Mallaxastra (at this time, the battalion was the largest military unit of the partisans) and the devotee of the revolutionary opposition.

Difi informed Xhepi how the Central Committee had condemned him, Xhepi, as well as Anastas to death. He described Anastas' assassination and warned that Xhepi was to be secretly killed in the night but would be buried with a great funeral because of his popularity among the fighters and the people of Valona.

Saying that he realized he was committing a breach of Party discipline, Difi declared that some way must be found to end the campaign against individuals. He voiced complete confidence in Xhepi and accused the Central Committee of being a mere clique intent upon monopolizing Party leadership. For this reason, he said, they aimed at exterminating all worthwhile revolutionaries. He appealed to Xhepi to advise, as an experienced Communist, how the clique's activities could be ended.

Xhepi thought that the best Communist way would be to call a congress at which at least two members of each cell would be present, along with all the members of the Regional Committee of Valona and one or two members of the Central Committee. (Since Valona was one of the most revolutionary centers, it was believed the first application of the Leninistic principles of democratic centralism should take place there. Later, all the other centers would follow its example.) The purpose of this congress would be to examine the mistakes and errors which had been committed and to condemn the guilty. If it developed in the course of the discussions that the Regional Committee of Valona no longer had the full confidence of the majority of the comrades, a new Committee would be elected democratically.

Despite the fact that 80 percent of the fighters wished the convocation of this congress, the Committee of Valona and also the Central Committee were categorically opposed to it. At first, they pretended to adopt the idea of such a congress so as to gain time and prepare a plan to eliminate the most active and conscientious comrades.

- 6 -

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

50X1-HUM

As soon as they had prepared their plan of terrorism, they secretly arrested the political commissar of the Dukati commune. They also organized an ambush to assassinate Comrade Xhepi, but he escaped death because his comrades warned him in time. They also treacherously arrested the political commissar Xhemil Cakerri and Major Vangjo of the battalion of Valona. These two were taken to a mill to be executed. The political commissar was brutally assassinated, but the Major escaped with only a hand wound and took refuge in a village, where he was received in a friendly manner by the inhabitants. Memet Shehu (today the most famous criminal in Albania and a Stalinist commanding general) went to this village and again arrested Vangjo, telling the villagers that the assassinations had been committed accidentally by the escort and that now Vangjo was going to be tried by the Party judges. Vangjo was taken to a house in the midst of a forest and forced to sign a paper giving command of the battalion to Memet Shehu. Vangjo was kept prisoner for 3 months, until he escaped and joined his comrades of the opposition. In the meantime, assassinations of the revolutionary opposition had been increasing. Through newspapers and propaganda, the leaders tried to make it appear that the demand that the congress be convoked was for the purpose of destroying the Party and a conspiracy directed by Xhepi.

If the revolutionary opposition had had the intention of plotting, the overthrow of the Stalinist clique, as the Stalinists pretended, this would have been inevitable and easy, since the latter was in the minority at Valona. But the comrades of the revolutionary opposition refused to use the terrorist methods of the Stalinists and desired to act in the most legal manner in Party affairs. They were not, and could not be enemies of the Party, but the ruling clique had decided to suppress them once and for all by any means.

It is evident that the Albanian revolutionary opposition has been the victim of its scruples, scruples which permitted the systematic elimination of all the fighters who had declared themselves in favor of the congress. Obviously, the bureaucratic clique refused to convoke the congress because it could not justify its actions, particularly its deviation from the true Communist line. It was easier to gain time by terrorism. If the Stalinist leaders had been true revolutionaries, they would not have been so afraid to call the congress, the sole purpose of which was to correct past mistakes and to elect the functionaries of the Party in a democratic manner.

The Communists who had sacrificed so much to found the Party could not be tempted to destroy the work of their own hands. The Stalinists were quite aware of this. The main reason for the Stalinist machinations was the fear of losing control of the Party. But, even if they had wished to accept the perfectly justifiable proposition of the revolutionary opposition, they could not since they were not independent. Someone else was the real commander in Albania -- Generalissimo Stalin.

In any case, the tragic situation suffices to demonstrate that Stalinism has not only replaced fascism but has surpassed it in its methods as in its politics.

Evidently one could not expect much from the Albanian Communist Party when other Communist Parties, old Parties with good revolutionary traditions like the French Communist Party, for a long time have been the simple tools of the bureaucratic clique of the Kremlin. The Albanian Communist movement was still in its embryonic stage when it was contaminated by Stalinism. Very few comrades had even a rudimentary notion of Marxism-Leninism. All the others were sympathizers of a sentimental plan expounding the justice of Communism rather than being trained revolutionary fighters. Actually, it is difficult to become a Communist by decree, which is what happened in Albania. Communists are the products of special social and economic conditions (the struggles of the classes) which had not reached sufficient maturity in Albania. The Communist Party had not even been in existence for a year and a half and the Albanian Communists had not had sufficient time to become indoctrinated and to develop.

- 7 -

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

50X1-HUM

The industrial proletariat and, consequently, the organized class struggle did not exist. What is admirable is that the Albanian people, in spite of the arduous struggle for existence and against the oppression of foreign powers, have shown an incomparable revolutionary spirit.

After the refusal to convoke the congress and the employment of terrorist methods against the revolutionary opposition, the Stalinist clique published a long tract entitled, "Why We Have Separated From the So-Called Communist Party," and signed it, "The True Communist Organization." The purpose of this tract was to inform the fighters of the Party and the entire population about the treachery which was being hatched.

After publication of the tract, the movement of the revolutionary opposition of Valona was followed by similar movements in other centers of Albania, particularly in the center of Berati where the revolutionary fighters Resul, Mamik, and Fathardh were the leaders.

Unfortunately, these movements were only of local importance because they began at a period when the bureaucratic clique had consolidated its position by its terrorist and demagogic methods.

The Stalinists next accused the revolutionary opposition of favoring reaction. The revolutionaries, however, proved by supporting facts that it was the Stalinists who were deceiving the masses and Party sympathizers by using terrorist methods against comrades who were known to all as having been revolutionary fighters from the very beginning. The people could not help being alienated from this Party when they witnessed the assassinations of the best-known revolutionaries, such as Anastas Lula, Neki Hoxha (Vangja), Xhemil Cakerri, Lazar Fundo, Resul Tozhari, Mamik Nequemerja, Xhafer Dalmi, Xhelal Hoxha, Nimet Mita, Haki Xhelo, Duro Xanina, Idajet Bolena, Zef Joja, and a hundred others who had distinguished themselves by their revolutionary activity.

(Lazar Fundo and Halim Xhelo were the first Communist propagandists in Albania. Lazar Fundo was also a member of the Comintern for a long time, but he left this when he saw that it had been transformed into a mere instrument under orders of the Kremlin's bureaucratic clique. After he had left the Comintern, he denounced Stalin's treason. To safeguard the Communist tradition, he propagated Trotskyist ideas in Albania.)

The people could not help losing confidence in this Party when they learned that a fascist colonel in the Italian army fired three shots in the air as a sign of his joy for the assassinations of these revolutionary heroes who had been thorns in the sides of the fascists in Albania.

How could the people help being horrified on learning that the most inflexible enemies of fascism and reaction had been assassinated by their own Party and that the most cherished desires of the fascists were in this way being fulfilled by their worthy rivals, the Stalinists?

As soon as the Stalinist agents intervened, the Albanian Communist movement degenerated. The former voluntary respect, inspired by the comrades who had given outstanding proofs of their devotion to the movement, was replaced by the forced idolatry of worthless persons, of ignorant and vile bourgeois members such as Colonel-General Enver Hoxha and Company.

The majority of the Party's fighters, sympathizers, and the entire Albanian population perceive more clearly every day the growing degeneration of Communism, due to the Stalinist bureaucratic clique. The so-called people's courts render great service by permitting the Albanian people to see more clearly and to understand better the real intentions of the promoters of the new "People's Democracies."

- 8 -

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL
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50X1-HUM

The cowardly assassinations of hundreds of Marxist-Leninist revolutionaries, the recent death sentence of the well-known old revolutionary Hasan Recj, the imprisonment of the revolutionary Kadri Hoxha, the disfavor of the old revolutionary Sejfulla Maleshova, the social and economic privileges of the bureaucratic caste, and above all, the oppression of the people by the dictatorship of a single clique, are the most outstanding features of the betrayal of the Albanian Communist movement.

Hasan Recj was condemned to death three times for being a Communist: by the government of King Zog, by the fascist occupation forces, and for the third time by the Stalinists.

Kadri Hoxha, one of the most devoted revolutionary fighters, did much for the Communist cause.

Sejfulla Maleshova, a pioneer of Albanian Communism, spent a large part of his life outside of Albania trying to coordinate the Albanian movement with that of other countries. For a long time he was professor of materialistic philosophy at the University of Moscow.

Now the question arises whether the Albanian people will remain eternally passive and consider this state of affairs as an incurable malady. No, never! Having seen with their own eyes the betrayal of their ideal as well as that of the thousands of comrades killed for this ideal, they will eventually stop the crimes of the Stalinists and under the banner of the Fourth Communist International will follow the road toward the enfranchisement of human society and toward Socialism.

After this article was written, an important crisis developed in the Albanian Communist Party as a result of the Yugoslav affair. Five members of the Politburo have been called on the carpet. Two of them, Minister of the Interior Koci Xoxe, and Pandi Kristo, have lost Party membership and government position and have joined the underground opposition.

It is certain that this crisis will help the Albanian revolutionaries free themselves of the Stalinist domination which, as has been seen above, has had a disastrous effect on the young Communist movement.

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- 9 -
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